

## STRAC XXI

# Budgeting the Bullets: The Master Gunners' Concerns

by Sergeant First Class David Cooley

A master gunners conference was held at Fort Knox, Ky., 22 through 24 June 1999, with master gunners from across FORSCOM, USAREUR, 8th Army, and the U.S. Marine Corps, as well as Crew/Gunnery Doctrine and Master Gunner Branch. Discussions covered the *FM 17-12* rewrite, TWGSS training, ammunition allocations, and numerous other subjects, with perhaps the most contentious issue being STRAC XXI. This article will try to explain the reasons behind changing *DA PAM 350-38*, known as "STRAC," the issues involved (from the master gunner's point of view), and the consensus of the conference members.

First, it is important to understand — and accept — that Army doctrine as it applies to gunnery training is going to change. Assumptions that used to hold true, such as every crew firing a full Table VIII at least twice a year, are no longer valid. Modifications to that strategy, whether "legal" or not, have become a fact of life. "Validation," in its many forms, is the most familiar example. Validation has, in fact, become unofficial doctrine across the Armor Force, and it is too late to shove that particular genie back in the bottle. One problem with validation is that, as it is not derived from any published Army doctrine, each MACOM has implemented it differently, and standardization has been lost. Once doctrine is updated, we can ensure that everyone is on the same sheet of music and that a common standard is achieved.

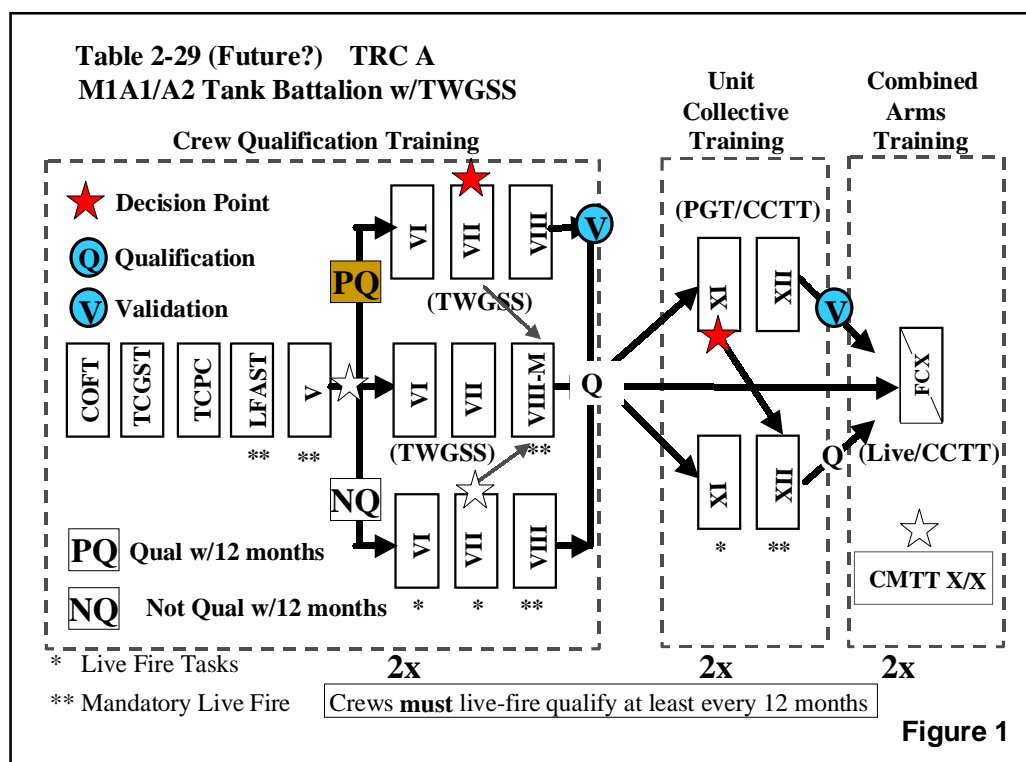
Another force driving the changes now underway is the desire to better train collective

tasks by allocating more ammunition to training events such as Table XII and CALFEX. The current STRAC allocates 12 rounds (per platoon), less than required by *FM 17-12* to conduct Table XII, and there are no rounds allocated for CALFEX.

A FORSCOM working group has been addressing these issues, and the results of their labors have come to be known as STRAC XXI. Bear in mind that, as we discuss tank-specific aspects of STRAC XXI, changes will affect the training programs for every weapon system in the Army. STRAC XXI is on the FORSCOM web site, and interested readers are encouraged to take a look at the entire package.

The first wide dissemination of STRAC XXI to the Armor enlisted community was at the Sergeants Major conference at the 1999 Armor Conference. Shortly thereafter, Crew/Gunnery Doctrine and Master Gunner Branch got their first detailed look. The heart of the concept can be seen in Figure 1.

A crew's track through gunnery would depend on the previous qualification of the gunner and TC. If a TC or gunner did not qualify the previous Table VIII, live-fire, the crew would take the bottom track and fire Tables VI through VIII full up, main gun. If the TC and gunner both fired the last Table VIII live, but not together, their crew would take the middle track and fire TWGSS through VII and live-





**Big Bullets... Big Money.** Each practice sabot round (M865) costs the taxpayers \$490. Practice HEAT rounds (M831A1) cost \$520 each. Each crew is allocated 64 sabot and 26 HEAT practice rounds per year, so the ammo cost of a single crew's gunnery allocation is \$44,880. A battalion of 44 tanks runs up an ammo bill of \$1,974,720 per year.

fire a modified Table VIII. If both TC and gunner both live-fired Table VIII together during the last gunnery, the crew would fire through VIII using TWGSS, then move into collective training. Remember, the goal is to save rounds for Table XII and CALFEX. Rounds for collective live fire have to come from existing allocations, without increasing the current authorization of 90 rounds per tank, per year.

The sergeants major, master gunner instructors, and Crew/Gunnery Doctrine personnel have many concerns with this approach. They include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Table VIII, as a qualification table, should never be modified or fired dry.
- A crew should never arrive at Table VIII without having fired any main gun rounds since last gunnery.
- A crew should never move into collective training without having fired main gun rounds (the screening test does not count as main gun training). The major concern here is that a crew could find

itself on Table XII with a loader or driver that has no live fire experience at all. This leads to safety concerns when a loader has to perform actions, such as clearing an aft cap jam, which he has not faced before, while his TC is distracted by what's happening to the rest of the platoon and not what is happening inside his own tank.

- Currently, the only place that commanders and master gunners can assess proficiency on individual and crew gunnery tasks is during the intermediate tables, VI through VIII. Once the crew moves into platoon level exercises, the jump radios and TCEs are no longer there to capture data on crew performance.
- There was nearly unanimous agreement at this conference, and it was brought up by a few participants at the Armor Conference, that one of the root causes of our current retention woes is that tankers don't get to do enough of what keeps tankers in the Army — tanking. This strategy would only make the problem worse.

In summary, collective live fire training is important, but it will only be as good as the individual and crew training that it is based on. We should not be in a position where we have to choose one or the other, but when forced to choose, most participants agreed that the crew level training should get priority for resources.

The vast majority of participants at this conference favored the Armor Center approach, as outlined in the "Driver's Seat" on page 6, over the FORSCOM concept, for the reasons listed above. As noncommissioned officers, our focus is training individuals and crews for combat. To do so, we require resources that are expensive and that can never be completely replaced by simulators or training devices. Our final consensus was that the FORSCOM concept was too much, too fast. Before going to a virtual Table VIII of any kind, we had better take "baby steps" and see how it affects readiness.

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